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Groton students head back to school



Students that just stepped off school buses walk towards the entrance of Groton Middle School Tuesday, Aug. 30, 2022, on the first day the school. (Dana Jensen/The Day)



August 30, 2022 1:52 pm

By **Kimberly Drelich**

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Groton — As students headed back to school Tuesday in Groton, a plan to increase equity in the classroom and a continued focus on social-emotional learning are among the district's goals for the new school year.

Superintendent Susan Austin said the Groton 2020 plan, to promote “excellence, equity, and efficiency,” by upgrading and consolidating school facilities has been fully realized. The consolidated Groton Middle School opened adjacent to Robert E. Fitch High School in September 2020 and two new elementary magnet-themed schools opened in September 2021, as the district transitioned to all magnet-themed elementary schools.

Austin said the district authorized last spring the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme for grades six through 10. In addition to the longstanding International Baccalaureate Diploma program at Fitch High School, there was also authorization for the International Baccalaureate Career-related Programme.

Austin said the Groton school district will continue its commitment to excellence, equity and efficiency by ensuring that classrooms, not just schools, mirror the community.

Groton schools will continue to implement an equity plan to encourage more children, especially those who have been historically underrepresented, to take advanced placement, international baccalaureate and University of Connecticut courses.

Austin said the idea came from students who asked why there aren't more students who look like them in higher-level classes.

“Student voice has been raised up in Groton to put it into action,” Austin said.

The district also will continue to encourage teachers to set not only academic goals but also social-emotional learning goals, Austin said. She explained that it's been harder for students to adjust to going back to school, and teachers have done an amazing job to get students back and not only accelerate their learning but also take care of their social-emotional needs. She cited an example of a teacher who took a course on mindfulness and not only used that as a calming strategy with students, but also practiced mindfulness with students and staff.

Austin also announced that the district was able to secure an additional administrator at its two largest elementary schools — Mystic River Magnet School and Thames River Magnet School.

Shira Sabo started teaching at S.B. Butler Elementary School in the fall of 2006 as a special education teacher. Last year, she transitioned to be an assistant principal, splitting her time between Mystic River and Thames River Magnet Schools, but now will be supporting Mystic River Magnet School.

“I am honored and eager to be starting my 17th year in Groton as an educator,” Sabo said.

Amber Monahan will be an assistant principal at Thames River Magnet School. Monahan said this will be her 11th year in Groton and she has been a special education teacher for the past 10 years, including 9 years at Claude Chester Elementary School and last year at Thames River. She worked closely all those years with Jamie Giordano, Thames River Magnet School principal and former Claude Chester principal, and also Sabo last year.

“I have learned a great deal from them and am excited for this school year in this new role,” Monahan said.

While Groton experienced problems with bus runs last year amid a driver shortage, Austin said she is hoping for an improvement this year. She said the bus runs are fully staffed and there are three extra buses for pre-school and special education students.

“I'm looking forward to smooth sailing — or smooth rides,” she quipped.

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